

**You are there...
...at Miletus**

Intro: We haven't had opportunity to "travel" for a while in our Sunday evening lessons; so let's once more take a look at another city of importance in the NT world. You are there tonight at Miletus.

Facts about ancient Miletus

An important seaport city in the Greco-Roman world where the Maeander River (from which we get our word "meander.") empties into the sea into a bay. It was located on a peninsula that jutted out from the mainline and made it a suitable place for harbors for the ships that moved around this part of the world.

Many centuries before the time of Paul Greeks had migrated across the Aegean and settled in this area. It was called Ionia.

It was home of the famous Greek philosopher Thales and the architect Hippodamus (who originated the grid style of city planning we still use today in our cities).

Miletus participated in the Ionian revolt against the Persian Empire and was destroyed in the 5th century; but would later be rebuilt and become a very prosperous city, only second to Ephesus to the north. In the 2nd century BC this area would come under Roman control.

Today you can still see in the city some of the common features of a Greco-Roman city:

An elaborate gateway into the marketplace from Miletus was excavated and reconstructed in the Pergamum Museum in Berlin (dates from the Hadrian period, 2nd century).

The agora or marketplace where people would come to conduct business. You can see some of the columns from the Ionic Stoa (or colonnade) as well as a Roman fountain.

The theater in Roman times could seat 5300; later it was enlarged by Trajan to seat over 15,000 (Some say 25,000). (A Byzantine fortress/castle was later built at the top).

Archaeologists have noted a special inscription found on the seating of the theater. There is an inscription indicating a place reserved for the Jews. Translation: "Place of the Jews, who are also called God-fearing" (Light from the Ancient East, by Adolf Deissmann, p. 451). It may be related to a comment from Josephus that the Jews in Miletus were granted freedom of religion. (Were they allowed to sit by themselves in the theater for this reason to avoid defilement?)

A Jewish presence is also indicated by the ruins of an ancient synagogue. It is possible that some from this synagogue eventually became Christians and that a small congregation was formed in Miletus (cf. 2 Tim. 4:20).

And like most Greco-Roman cities, Miletus had temples honoring Greek gods like the Delphinion and the goddess Athena.

The ancient Milesians believed that Apollo had turned himself into a dolphin to lure Cretan sailors to land in this area. Thus he is called Apollo Delphinios (the dolphin).

Due the silting of the river into the sea Miletus is now about 5 miles inland; but in NT times it was on the shoreline of Asia as it was then called.

Ships would come in and out of two main harbors, one on the west and one on the east.

It was because of the fact that Miletus was a harbor city that it plays an important role in the account of the Apostle Paul's preaching journeys.

Paul's address to the elders of Ephesus

Luke tells us that Paul was on the last part of his 3rd missionary journey. He had been worked for a lengthy period of time in Ephesus and then traveled west through Troas and Macedonia, eventually wintering in Corinth.

During this time Paul was encouraging the churches to collect money each first day of the week to contribute toward the needs of the saints in Jerusalem.

Now that the winter had passed, Paul was ready to accompany the brethren from the various contributing congregations back to Jerusalem. Sending them on ahead to Troas, he and Luke departed from Cenchrea and made his way to Troas where he visited the brethren and preached to them on the first day of the week (Ac. 20:7).

Luke reports Paul's travels as he made his way toward Jerusalem. Paul was hurrying since he wanted to be in Jerusalem by Pentecost.

But we, going ahead to the ship, set sail for Assos, intending from there to take Paul on board; for thus he had arranged it, intending himself to go by land. And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. And sailing from there, we arrived the following day opposite Chios; and the next day we crossed over to Samos; and the day following we came to Miletus. For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus in order that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. (Acts 20:13-16)

Here at Miletus Paul called for the elders of the church at Ephesus which he had just passed to come down and see him there:

And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. (Acts 20:17)

To their credit these men were willing to make the 37 mile journey from Ephesus to Miletus to meet Paul there. Luke records the wonderful remarks of Paul to these men. It is the third major discourse of Paul recorded in Acts in addition to the synagogue sermon of Acts 13 to the Jews and the Sermon on Mars Hill to the Gentiles in Ac. 17. And in many ways it may be the most candid revelation of Paul as a man in the NT.

Paul's Message for the Elders at Ephesus

Clearly Paul did not intend to ever see these men again. He had worked among them for nearly three years while on his third preaching journey.

So first:

He rehearses before them the work he had done among them.

And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

He reveals the uncertain dangers that lay before him and his willingness to even give his life to complete his work.

And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. (Ac. 20:22-24)

He testifies of his faithfulness in proclaiming all the truth.

And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. (Ac. 20:25-27)

He urges them to take care of the Ephesian flock with the same selfless service and warns them of apostasy to come.

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. (Ac. 20:

He commends them to God's grace and word to enable them to grow in faith and be saved eternally; and appeals to his example to motivate them to a similar attitude toward God's people.

And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Ac. 20:

Having completed his message, Paul knelt with them on the seashore and led them in prayer, no doubt appealing for God's blessing upon them, and for their faithfulness through the trials that would yet come upon them.

Paul's selfless life and service had created a loving bond between him and the people at Ephesus. The very thought that they would never see him again broke their hearts. They wept at the thought of it, and showed their deep affection for him with both kisses and embraces before he left them.

Lessons from Paul's remarks

The proper approach of leaders to the people of God

First the importance of recognizing that the church is God's, not our own. It was purchased with the greatest price--by His own blood. And that we lovingly care for or tend God's flock.

Paul demonstrates the proper attitudes toward God's people and his work. He was a humble servant of the Lord, willing to sacrifice for their good, working with his own hands to provide not only his needs, but also the poor among them, recognizing that it was more blessed to give than to receive.

As a teacher Paul was available to teach God's people and willing to reveal the truth on everything, not holding back anything that would be profitable to them.

The need to be vigilant against false teachers who do not spare the flock

Paul's exhortation underscores the importance of care in selecting leaders and teachers who are trustworthy with the gospel.

The importance of the grace and word of God as the keys to faithfulness

Ultimate our faithfulness cannot be secured by any man. Instead it rests in entrusting ourselves to God's care and the guidance of His word.

Conclusion: And so tonight, we've shared a little bit into the experience of Paul by seeing some the things he saw in the place where he last spoke to these beloved brethren.